

CONTENTS

2 AID AND TRADE: TURKEY'S ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA DURING COVID-19

By Sarah Daly

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5 AFRICAN PHILANTHROPY: STEPPING UP IN TIME OF NEED

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About IDA

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AID AND TRADE: TURKEY'S ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA DURING COVID-19

By Sarah Daly

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Turkey mobilized its federal Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) to provide aid and assistance abroad. Turkish state-sponsored news outlets touted deliveries of personal protective equipment (PPE), medical supplies, and food to at least 24 countries in Africa. This assistance aligns with Turkey's strategy to project influence and leadership in Africa, where it cultivates bilateral relations by offering humanitarian or economic aid to partner countries and appealing to shared history and religion. It builds upon these relationships to establish trade and—in some cases—security agreements and to solicit geopolitical support. In the past, Turkish leadership has invoked its success in Africa to shore up domestic political support, but in recent months, Turkey's foreign aid has drawn criticism in the face of its mounting economic and political crises at home. Nevertheless, COVID-19 has not slowed Turkey's progress in Africa; rather it has allowed it to engender goodwill with existing partners in North Africa and the Horn and to create new inroads to African nations further afield.

Ties in North Africa and the Horn

Since adopting an Action Plan for Africa in 1998, Turkey has forged economic and humanitarian ties across North Africa and the Horn. Turkey has [increased](#) its efforts to build and diversify relationships across Africa throughout President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's time in office, first as prime minister from 2003 to 2014 and then as president since 2017. The Turkish government declared 2005 the "Year of Africa." In 2008, it established the Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit to boost strategic partnerships through the African Union and became a non-regional member of the African Development Bank. Turkey's concerted efforts to build diplomatic and economic partnerships over the past 15 years have paid off. In 2005, Turkey had 12 embassies in Africa; today it has 42, with two more [planned](#) in Togo and Guinea-Bissau. During this same period, Erdoğan made 49 [visits](#) to the continent. Bilateral trade volumes have [quadrupled](#) due to Turkey's aggressive pursuit of free and preferential trade agreements across the continent. Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board has business councils in over 25 African countries.

Boosting trade is one of Turkey's primary goals for African relations, and it often creates a foothold by first extending offers for development assistance or investment. TIKA, Turkey's aid organization, supports a wide assortment of [projects](#) on the continent, including vocational training, agricultural education, construction of school and health infrastructure, and provision of sanitation and health-care equipment. TIKA [maintains](#) 30 coordination centers across Africa. Turkey frequently refers to its experience in [Somalia](#) as an exemplar of where it first provided humanitarian aid in 2011, followed by investments in development and capacity building. From 2014 onward, Turkey increased resources for Somalia's security sector, and in 2017 it [opened](#) its first foreign military base in Mogadishu. In the past decade, Turkey has invested as much as \$1 billion in Somalia. In return, Somalia aligned itself with Turkey and Qatar in the wake of the Gulf Cooperation Council split, and even asked the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to [leave](#) Somalia in 2016. In 2020, Somalia [supported](#) Turkey's bid to explore for oil in contested waters off the Somali and Kenyan coasts. Ankara has used its successful partnership with Somalia to build credibility with other Muslim-majority countries in Africa.

In North and East African countries in particular, Turkey appeals to shared religious and historical characteristics to assert itself vis-à-vis Gulf nations and the West. Turkey restores Ottoman-era [mosques](#) and cultural centers and offers itself as a contemporary [model](#) for Islam and democracy. In late 2017, Sudan and Turkey agreed to develop [Suakin Island](#) in the

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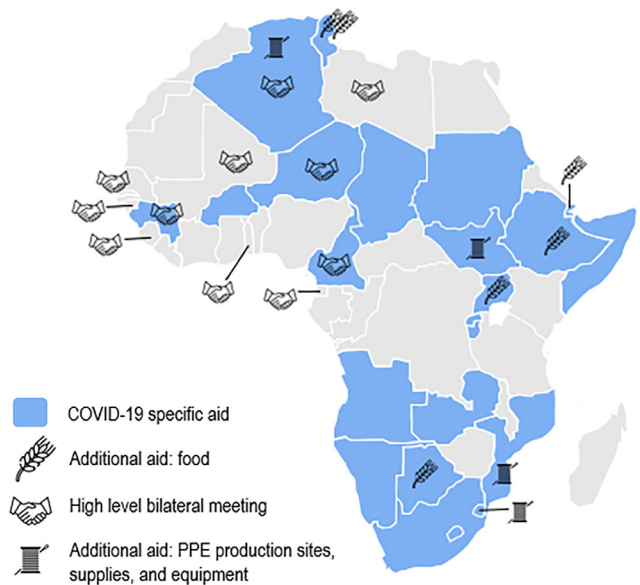
Red Sea to restore Ottoman-era structures for tourism. Concerns over Turkey's potential military use and development of the island created [tensions](#) with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, although these subsided following President Omar al-Bashir's ouster in 2019, when Turkey's non-touristic plans for Suakin were [reportedly](#) sidelined. Erdoğan has also invoked the legacy of the Ottomans to foment domestic support for Turkey's role in the conflict in Libya, where it [provides](#) drones, advisors, and mercenaries to support the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. Turkey relies on its Libyan partners to [support](#) Turkish hydrocarbon exploration off Cyprus in the midst of competing claims from Greece and consternation from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In its bid to assert its Islamic identity and Ottoman Empire roots, Turkey has explicitly and implicitly challenged Western actors in the region, notably fellow NATO member France. In a November interview, French President Emmanuel Macron [decried](#) Turkish rhetoric that fosters anti-French sentiment in the Sahel and the Maghreb.

COVID-19 Aid

The COVID-19 crisis has provided an opportunity for Turkey to strengthen long-standing relationships on the continent and to expand the radius of its support and influence beyond North and East Africa. In March, Turkey [doubled](#) its commitment to the African Development Bank to maintain its status as non-regional voting member. According to Turkish [media](#) and TIKA's [website](#), the agency has facilitated the transfer of medical equipment and supplies to 24 African countries, including traditional partners such as Tunisia and Algeria, as well as newer partners like Zambia and Botswana (see map). Turkey also sent food aid to five of these countries. In addition, TIKA established and equipped mask and PPE production sites in Algeria, Eswatini, Mozambique, and South Sudan. In May and December 2020, Turkey's state-owned media agencies heralded aid distribution as a success, [contrasting](#) Turkey's response to the virus at home and abroad with that of the West.

Following its humanitarian blitz, Turkey returned its attention to trade and diplomacy. Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board highlighted the shared challenge of COVID-19 and the opportunity to collaborate with Africa on [economic](#) development in a May panel co-hosted by the African Development Bank. Representatives from Turkey advocated maintaining trade to [stimulate](#) recovery in the post-pandemic period. Turkey's primary [exports](#) to Africa are construction, steel, textiles, food, and military supplies and equipment, while it imports raw materials and energy. Turkey's African trade partners tend to run significant trade [deficits](#) with Turkey, but countries such as Morocco have aimed for a more equitable [balance](#) in recent negotiations. The Turkey-Africa Economy and Business Forum in October [showcased](#) \$70 billion of Turkish investment in African projects that employ over 100,000 Africans.

TURKISH ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA DURING COVID-19



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On the diplomatic side, Turkey's leadership has had at least 13 high-level bilateral meetings with African counterparts since the summer. Between July and December 2020, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşço [visited](#) eight African nations, mostly in West Africa and the Sahel. During this same period, representatives from Algeria, the Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone visited Turkey, and in late January, heads of state from Guinea-Bissau and Senegal [met](#) with Erdoğan in Istanbul. These meetings have yielded a variety of [deals](#), including for construction in Senegal and mineral exploration and military cooperation in Niger.

Despite Troubles at Home, No Signs of Slowing Down

Turkey's COVID-19 relief efforts in humanitarian and economic domains in Africa belie [domestic](#) challenges. At times, Erdoğan has projected domestic politics into Turkey's foreign policy and leaned on foreign policy to conduct domestic politics, but this strategy does not appear to be working in the face of a deteriorating situation at home. Following a failed coup attempt in 2016, Turkey leveraged its economic influence in Africa to pressure governments to close schools linked to Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen, who Ankara blamed for the coup and designated as a terrorist. Countries such as South Africa and [Kenya](#) opted not to comply; however, Gambia, Guinea, Somalia, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Gabon, Senegal, and Mali closed schools or [transferred](#) them to the Turkish government's custodianship.

Since 2018, Erdoğan has grown increasingly authoritarian and increasingly [unpopular](#). An economic crisis that began in 2018 further [eroded](#) support for the leader among the Turkish population and within his own party. Due to COVID-19, the economic outlook in Turkey is inauspicious, as [unemployment](#) is currently at 13% and the Lira is [depreciating](#). Erdoğan's continued courtship of African partnerships may reflect a [need](#) to maintain positive trade balances in the long term to reduce growing fiscal risk. His government has brandished its [authoritarian](#) leanings, repressing civil society and medical organizations under a new terrorism [law](#). Freedom House reports that at least [400](#) people have been arrested in Turkey since December for social-media posts related to the coronavirus or the government's response and mitigation measures. In light of the domestic situation, opposition figures have [criticized](#) Turkey's aid and assistance to Africa and elsewhere during the pandemic. Nevertheless, Turkey shows no signs of slowing its economic and diplomatic overtures in Africa or deviating from its aid-then-trade playbook. In fact, despite ongoing outbreaks of coronavirus, high-level diplomatic meetings continue apace while TIKA has resumed executing its full spectrum of non-COVID projects, ranging from playground construction in Namibia to meteorology training in Mozambique.

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AFRICAN PHILANTHROPY: STEPPING UP IN TIME OF NEED

By Dr. Dorina Bekoe

Driven by fears that their nations' fragile health-care infrastructures could not bear the brunt of the current pandemic, many African governments quickly issued [lockdown orders and closed borders](#). Some posit that these quick and strict measures may have [limited](#) the rapid spread of the virus as observed in other countries. Yet many Africans suffered income loss and hunger; approximately [81%](#) of Africans work in the informal economy and depend on daily wages for survival. The pandemic may plunge [26–40 million](#) in sub-Saharan Africa into poverty. Some governments attempted to mitigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 with emergency cash transfers or other subsidies. Only [5% of Africans](#) received cash transfers or other type of support to alleviate hardships, compared with 22% globally. Given the scale of the suffering, these public initiatives have not sufficed. Philanthropic initiatives by Africans responded to the hardships created by following COVID-19 protocols by raising funds to subsidize poor families, providing medical equipment, distributing food supplies, educating the general public, and alleviating other suffering.

Initiatives by Africa's Billionaires

Collectively, African philanthropy has provided food, health care, housing, and other needs in response to the pandemic. Some of Africa's billionaires, like Nigeria's [Tony Elumelu](#) and Zimbabwe's [Strive Masiyiwa](#), used their existing foundations to address the hardships and medical shortages. Particularly striking, however, are the initiatives that grew out of the pandemic from the continent's wealthiest to ordinary well-meaning citizens. The response to COVID-19 showcases the agility of African philanthropy to organize and respond to a continental emergency, as well as the growth of Africa's middle class. According to the [African Philanthropy Network](#), the wealthiest Africans have the potential to give from \$3 billion to \$7 billion per year.

Aliko Dangote, head of the Dangote Group and, with a reported wealth of [\\$12.1 billion](#), Africa's richest person, spearheaded the creation of the Coalition Against COVID (CACOVID) in Nigeria. Within two weeks of its founding, CACOVID raised [15.3 billion Nigerian naira](#) (\$40,220,000). Dangote partnered with the Central Bank of Nigeria to bring together [prominent members](#) of Nigeria's private sector. CACOVID aimed to work alongside the government, promising to provide "support in areas that would result in improved health and societal outcomes." To that end, CACOVID [focused](#) on purchasing medical supplies and equipment, providing food for Nigerians in need, and disseminating information on the virus.

The acute economic hardship caused by the pandemic and measures to control it [coincided](#) with the violence erupting during the protests against the human rights abuses committed by Nigeria's Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS). In October 2020, Nigerian security forces killed 50 protestors, prompting demonstrators to retaliate by looting and burning buildings, including CACOVID food warehouses. The discovery of large amounts of undistributed food in the CACOVID warehouses led many to loot more warehouses, some accusing CACOVID of corruption and ineptitude at a time when Nigerians needed it most. CACOVID responded, in part, by [pledging](#) to create employment opportunities for Nigerian youth.

The Solidarity Fund and the South Africa Future Trust (SAFT) showcase South Africa's private sector response to combatting the pandemic. The government created the Solidarity Fund on March 23, 2020, as a vehicle to raise the funds needed to combat COVID-19. Over the course of six months, the Solidarity Fund raised, [3.11 billion South African rand](#) (\$207.6 million) from corporations, individuals, and foreign donors—including a contribution of [1 billion South African rand](#) from Mary Oppenheimer and her daughters, members of one of the country's [wealthiest](#) families. The Solidarity Fund [focused](#) 70% of its

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work on the provision of medical equipment and supplies; 20% of its work included food relief and countering gender-based violence; and 10% included programs to encourage behavioral changes to adapt to COVID-19 protocols.

SAFT, established by Nicky and Jonathan Oppenheimer, [provided](#) small and medium enterprises interest-free loans to pay their employees who were at risk of losing their jobs or losing significant income as a result of the pandemic. Although these loans are no longer being offered, SAFT [provided](#) 9,656 loans and assisted 92,993 employees.

Community Initiatives

Several community-level initiatives have responded to the economic and humanitarian crises caused by the pandemic and protocols to control it. In Kenya, [Adopt a Family](#), part of the Kibera Community Emergency Response Team, was set up to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in Nairobi's largest slum. It provided opportunities for wealthy Kenyans to support a family in Kibera. Adoptive families [provided](#) vouchers redeemable at grocery stores, as well as cash transfers for health care and other needs, to families in Kibera. Adoptive families could [donate](#) funds through M-Changa, Kenya's crowdfunding platform. Within the first month, [169](#) families had been adopted.

In Lagos, Nigeria, food banks opened in the upscale Lekki neighborhood. The Adebajo family, who resided in the Lekki neighborhood, opened the People's Food Bank to provide food to those whose ability to earn a living and feed themselves was negatively affected by the lockdown. Within 10 days of opening, the People's Food Bank was serving [3,000](#) people a day. Similarly, musician Banky W established the [Lekki Food Bank](#), where contributors have donated cash; personal protective equipment; or in-kind products, such as clothing. Like Kenya's M-Changa, crowdfunding platforms in Nigeria, such as Angels Among Us and We Are Together, [raised](#) approximately [\\$11,000](#) within 25 days and [\\$42,000](#) within 12 days, respectively.

Conclusion

Africa's philanthropic response to COVID-19 has demonstrated impressive agility. Within days, organizations and platforms were established and responded overwhelmingly to meet the needs of fellow citizens. Looking ahead, the actions taken by African philanthropy show the potential to support other African nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on development and social challenges. Currently, many of Africa's NGOs rely on funding from abroad, which sometimes results in mismatched priorities between donors and recipients. Can African NGOs create closer ties to their communities by receiving funds from Africa-based philanthropic organizations? The expansion of CACOVID to address other areas of need—such as social conflict, employment opportunities, training, and business development—reflects the potential for broadening the stakeholders in community- and social-development organizations. As Africa continues to battle COVID-19—facing shortages in health care and uncertainties with vaccine availability—African philanthropy could play a critical role in meeting essential needs. In doing so, such philanthropy will not only help Africans weather the impacts of the pandemic but also develop capacities to address social and development needs that the state cannot meet.

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